

Message Text

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17

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05

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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6361

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 2108

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, IS, JO

SUBJ: POTENTIAL WEST BANK CANDIDATES FOR PALESTINIAN EXILE
GOVERNMENT

REF: JERUSALEM 2071; CAIRO 9837

1. SUMMARY. RECENT PRONOUNCEMENTS, BOTH IN PRESS AND IN PRIVATE FROM WEST BANK NOTABLES ANWAR KHATIB AND HIKMAT EL-MASRI, SUGGEST TO US THEY ARE POTENTIAL CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERSHIP IN ANY FUTURE PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE. END SUMMARY.

2. WE HAVE ALREADY REPORTED STATEMENT OF ANWAR KHATIB (JERUSALEM REFTTEL) PUBLICLY ENDORSING PLO AS PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE. NABLUS NOTABLE HIKMAT EL-MASRI IS REPORTED TO HAVE MADE SIMILAR STATEMENT IN AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE INTERVIEW AT ABOUT SAME TIME. MASRI TOLD US, FURTHERMORE, IN RECENT CONVERSATION (CONGEN MEMCON NOV 21, 1974) THAT HE THOUGHT WEST BANK NOTABLES WOULD PLAY ROLE IN FORMATION OF ANY FUTURE PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE, AND INDIRECTLY THAT HE WAS A POSSIBLE CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER.

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3. EAST JERUSALEM ARABIC PRESS OCT 31, 1974 PUBLISHED ARTICLE QUOTING BEIRUT SOURCE THAT PRIME MINISTER OF PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE MIGHT BE "PLO LEADER IN WEST BANK" OR INDEPENDENT PERSONALITY FROM AREA. "EL QUDS" ON NOV 8 CARRIED SIMILAR ARTICLE QUOTING PLO NEWS AGENCY (Wafa) DISCUSSION OF FORMATION OF GOVERNMENT IN EXILE THAT WOULD "NOT BE CONFINED TO NOTABLES AFFILIATED WITH PLO, BUT WILL INCLUDE ALSO NOTABLES FROM WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP RECOMMENDED BY PALESTINIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY."

4. ISRAELI JOURNALIST YEHUDA LITANI IN DEC 5 HAARETZ ARTICLE SPECULATES THAT KHATIB'S AND MASRI'S ANNOUNCED SUPPORT FOR PLO WAS MOVE ON THEIR PART TO PLAY MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATING ROLE IN EFFECT AS MEDIATORS BETWEEN TWO SIDES. HE SUGGESTS BOTH ARE ACCEPTABLE TO PLO AND PRESUMABLY HAVE TACIT CONSENT FROM KING HUSSEIN. MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE BELIEVES, ISRAELIS SEE THEM AS MODERATES AND WOULD PROBABLY NOT OPPOSE THEM. LITANI INTERPRETED KHATIB'S AND EL MASRI'S PRONOUNCEMENTS AS DIRECT APPEAL TO GOOI: "WITHOUT PARTICIPATION OF PLO, WE MODERATELY, CANNOT HOLD NEGOTIATIONS. HELP US BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE WHEN OTHER ELEMENTS, MORE RADICAL, TAKE OVER ABSOLUTE LEADERSHIP".

5. COMMENT: THERE IS THUS CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION HERE (AS IN CAIRO -- REFTEL) THAT WEST BANK NOTABLES WILL PLAY PROMINENT ROLE IN FORMATION OF PALESTINIAN GOVERNMENT IN EXILE. THIS LATEST PRONOUNCEMENT OF KHATIB'S SUPPORT FOR PLO SUGGESTS HE IS MAKING HIMSELF AVAILABLE. WHETHER HE WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE GIVEN HIS BACKGROUND AS MOST PROMINENT SUPPORTER AND AGENT OF KING HUSSEIN ON WEST BANK REMAINS TO BE SEEN. HIKMAT EL-MASRI'S CREDENTIALS ARE AT LEAST SUPERFICIALLY BETTER. HIS SUPPORT FOR PLO DATES BACK AT LEAST TO APRIL 1973 WHEN HE MET SADAT IN CAIRO. EL-MASRI TELLS US THAT AT THAT MEETING HE OPENLY SUPPORTED PLO AND TOLD SADAT WEST BANK DID NOT WANT KING HUSSEIN BACK. THOUGHOUT THIS PERIOD HE HAS HAD FREQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH PLO IN BEIRUT AND EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INCLUDING AT LEAST TWO MEETINGS WITH SADAT. INCLUSION OF WEST BANK NOTABLES IN ANY EXILE GOVERNMENT WOULD ON FACE OF IT BE STEP IN DIRECTION OF MODERATION. WHETHER IT WOULD BE MAINLY TACTICAL, OR WHETHER IT WOULD REFLECT GENUINE PLO DESIRE TO EXPLOIT BRIDGE-BUILDING POTENTIAL OF THESE LEADERS, WOULD REMAIN TO BE SEEN.

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